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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 002484

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TAGS: PREL BG
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S COURTESY CALL ON PM ZIA

REF: DHAKA 002440

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia Butenis, reason para 1.4 d.

¶1. (SBU) On April 26, Ambassador paid a 20-minute courtesy call on Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. PMO Additional Secretary Manirul Islam, two other PMO officials, MFA DG

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Americas Shahidul Islam, and P/E counselor (notetaker) were also present.

¶2. (C) Ambassador opened by presenting to Zia a thank-you note from FLOTUS for a present from Zia she had just received, and then congratulated the PM on the arrest of the last two members of Jamaatul Mujahidin Bangladesh's senior leadership body (reftel). Zia replied that the arrests were welcomed by all Bangladeshis, and agreed on the importance of following up new information developed as the result of these arrests to pursue the investigation to the very end.

¶3. (SBU) Zia affirmed her commitment to promoting education for women, saying she began in her first government in 1991 by providing free education for all girls up to grade 12. In her second government starting in 2001, she extended this to the intermediate and then the senior levels, as well as introducing a cash stipend to encourage rural families to send their girls to school. Her government, Zia stated, has also made major progress in improving access to sanitation and potable water.

¶4. (C) Asked to characterize U.S.-Bangladesh relations to give context to the Ambassador's upcoming consultations in Washington, Zia stated our relations are "very good" and that the BDG seeks to work together with the USG in key areas like counter-terrorism. Ambassador noted the USG would positively consider BDG requests for further CT assistance. "If we need, we will tell you," Zia said. The BDG, she added, would welcome donor help to improve Bangladesh's electrical generating capability since current shortages are also affecting the supply of water. Prompted by her Additional Secretary, she added that the Trade Act, to give Bangladesh

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duty-free access to the U.S. garment market, is another priority.

¶5. (C) Asked to look ahead to the elections, Zia affirmed that BNP "wants free and fair since it helps us more than others." She recalled that Jamaat Islami and the Awami League had worked together against her party in 1996, so AL's refusal to participate in a reform dialogue with the BNP if JI is present "is a lame excuse." She praised the current caretaker and electoral systems as successful and proven; if reforms were necessary, why hadn't the AL pursued them when it was the government? In response to the Ambassador's

query, Zia acknowledged there is an existing electoral code of conduct which the BNP supports as a matter of policy.

CHAMMAS